

Do you have "oppositional defiant disorder"? Are you shy? Do you grieve when someone dies? If you do the newest issue of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will list these and more than 350 other conditions as mental disorders. Being sad someone dies, being shy, or being a kid who won't listen to their parents now qualifies as a mental disorder. Psychiatrists will be able to diagnose and treat these conditions with mental disorder drugs. Many doctors are urging the publishers to rethink their choices of what could be considered a mental disorder. If a kid not listening to their parents is a mental disorder then we all qualify.

People are just searching for ways to deal with suffering and problems. Grief after someone dies can be so overpowering that people just want the best way to deal with it. Shyness can cause a person to miss many things or lose out on opportunities, so we need a way to get past it. A kid not listening frustrates parents and child so both might be looking for the quick fix. Is a classification of something as a mental disorder so that drugs can be prescribed the answer? Does that offer comfort? People have real problems but what's going to offer real comfort?

As Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians he shares the answer. Tribulation and suffering are going to enter a person's life. We can't escape. This isn't news to you. But in an effort to remove suffering as quickly as possible we may have steered wrongly. So Paul gets us back on track. He offers...

**Real comfort for real problems**  
**From God to us**  
**From God to us for others**

Rockefeller Plaza in New York City has a statue you've probably seen at least in pictures. Standing forty five feet tall in bronze is a depiction of Atlas holding the universe. Atlas figuratively holds the universe all the time there, you probably only feel like you're most of the time. Is that the kind of weight you feel stretched out across your shoulders? Weight that presses down till you can't move? Chokes you so that you feel you can't breathe? That's the troubles and tribulations Paul is describing which affect each person at one point or another in life. Whatever your particular trouble or tribulation I want you to realize something else. God is allowing you to bear that problem. **"The sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives."**

The world says tribulation is a sign of weakness. It brings discomfort and discomfort is always bad. Anything you must do to get rid of it is acceptable. So the world throws a bottle and glass in front of you to drown your troubles and problems. The world urges you to get medicated because the right concoction of drugs can make you feel better. There even are people who will tell you to swallow your troubles and problems. Just bury it inside. No matter what you do to solve the problem, it's completely up to you. If you despair, you have to pull yourself up. If you hurt physically or emotionally then you have to just feel better. The world wants you to deal with your own problems by finding comfort yourself.

Nine times in these verses Paul uses the word comfort. Not once does he mention a liquor bottle or a psychiatrist. Paul is definitely talking comfort here but it comes from a place far better than the world could hope for. **"Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles."** Paul mentions the true God and his Son Jesus Christ to say that everything he talks about comfort in this section flows from them. Only God, the true God, is the source of all comfort, hope, and consolation. Without the comfort of Christ you don't have real comfort for your real problems.

Christ Jesus is full of compassion and consolation. When real problems come Christ is really there by our side bringing real comfort from God to us. Notice he **"comforts us in all our troubles."** It says nothing of necessarily taking those troubles away. Christ walks with us with his strong protecting arm around us. He lifts us up strengthening us so we can walk under the pressure. He gives us exactly what we need and then some. **"So also through Christ our comfort overflows."** God's mercy and comfort in Christ is like an open faucet that flows till it matches and then overmatches the amount of trouble and problems we have. And Christ gives us comfort even more valuable than for our earthly troubles because he addresses our spiritual troubles. He gives us healing and forgiveness of sins. Real comfort for our real problems.

Imagine you and your family pull into a gas station after a hundred miles of driving. Everyone is tired and especially thirsty. You buy a bottle of water, open it, and drink the whole thing. You turn to head for the door saying you're ready to leave. Your family stands there still thirsty. You took every drop and didn't share. No one would act that way. Comfort from Christ is better than drinking down the water. It soothes, feels great, and is important. But there are other thirsty people still dealing with tribulation too. They need a drink. You've been given comfort from God to give to them.

Did you ever notice that when people asked Jesus for something it was never pain? They never asked to be hungry or have a failing business. No one ever came to Jesus and said allow me to owe a whole bunch in back taxes and penalties. The people wanted the glory in big miracles that would benefit them in some way. The man with leprosy in the gospel was the same. **"If you are willing, you can make me clean."** Jesus healed him and the man went away happy, not just because he was healed but because he knew God's grace personally. That happened only because he suffered. But his comfort made him uniquely equipped to share his story of trouble and healing from God. **"He went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news."** He could relate to other's suffering better than most because he lived it.

People are watching you right now. People you don't necessarily know or know in passing. They're coworkers, classmates, and relatives. They're watching to see how you react and what you do with tribulations. Will you complain to God? Will you scream at the top of your lungs that it's not fair? Will you stomp off and find some other way of comforting yourself? Will you use your experience to help them when they go through it? The man with leprosy was changed by his trouble and Christ's comfort. He was changed and he knew Jesus could change others too so he shared. If you aren't changed by trouble and tribulation and the comfort God gives, then how can you expect others to be?

Your suffering and tribulation presses down hard to remind you that Christ suffered worse. It reminds you of the sins you committed that crushed him on the cross. Christ promised himself suffering far greater than yours and mine. His pain and his suffering satisfied our need and accomplished our salvation. God's love for you, the comfort you need to make it through any problem or trouble here on earth is found in the comfort of the cross. And without troubles and tribulations you would never know God's grace.

So be joyful when suffering. God considers you worthy to demonstrate his comfort to someone else. **"If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."** We pass comfort from God on to others. But it's not just kind words or smiles we share. Comfort we can pass is comfort that comes first from him. So it too is found in Christ. And it is Christ we pass on, God's grace in Christ. Tribulation will come to us and to others, but we're comforted with the love of Jesus so we might be able to pass that love to others. Whatever God leads us into, trial, tribulation, or problem, God gives it to us to benefit and bless us and others.

No question you'll have problems in this world. But we can't go looking for help from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. We have a better manual, one that offers real comfort for our real problems. It tells of one who suffered far worse for us even crucifixion. It tells of comfort from God to us which promises ways through the problems that lead home to heaven. It tells of comfort from God to us for others so they too can have the same promises. We praise God with Paul for the comfort God gives to us through Christ.